

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

---

Op-Eds from ENSC230 Energy and the  
Environment: Economics and Policies

Undergraduate Research in Agricultural  
Economics

---

2021

## It's About Time Nebraska Ditches Coal

Riley Johnson

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/ageconugenc>



Part of the [Environmental Indicators and Impact Assessment Commons](#), [Natural Resources and Conservation Commons](#), [Oil, Gas, and Energy Commons](#), and the [Other Environmental Sciences Commons](#)

---

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Undergraduate Research in Agricultural Economics at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Op-Eds from ENSC230 Energy and the Environment: Economics and Policies by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Riley Johnson

[riley.johnson7@huskers.unl.edu](mailto:riley.johnson7@huskers.unl.edu)

November 12, 2021

### It's About Time Nebraska Ditches Coal

For too long now, Nebraska has relied on coal from our western neighbor, Wyoming. While this proximity to Wyoming's coal mines has led to cheap coal and cheap energy prices, it has made us reliant on out-of-state coal companies. It's great that energy is kept cheap using coal, but all of our money is getting sent out of state. Why send all of our money out-of-state when we can keep Nebraska's hard-earned money in Nebraska. Our beautiful state has an extremely large potential for renewable energy that we fail to utilize.

While there have been renewable energy projects such as solar and wind farms throughout the state, it is not happening fast enough. This is in part due to the fact that Nebraska is one of only twelve states that does not have a renewable energy standard. Paired with the fact that all electricity providers in Nebraska are publicly owned, and strive for the lowest possible prices, means the conversion to renewable energy will be too slow. The only real incentive for those public power districts to switch to green energy is public opinion. It is no secret that renewable energy is more expensive than coal, but the future benefits, far outweigh those costs.

Nebraska uses coal for 51% of its energy needs, despite the fact that Nebraska produces almost no coal. All the coal that Nebraska uses comes from Wyoming. This makes us unnecessarily reliant on Wyoming for our electricity. We have the resources to be energy independent, yet we chose to continue to fund Wyoming coal companies. Why rely on others when we can support and fund Nebraska industry and keep our hard-earned money in our state.

It doesn't make sense to keep relying on coal, especially when we have the potential for 100% renewable energy.

Climate change is real and you can already see its effects today. With warmer summers and more extreme weather events happening more often. If things continue to get worse, it could begin to have major repercussions on Nebraska's agriculture. If we don't change something soon it may be too late. Nebraska could be a leader on this issue if we decide to make a change. One of the major contributors to climate change is carbon that is produced during coal energy production and released into the atmosphere. This could all be avoided with the use of wind, solar, and hydroelectric power. Our beautiful state offers us these resources and we simply let them go to waste in favor of coal.

Many are worried that renewable energy is too expensive and will require too much land. A lot of landowners are skeptical of selling or leasing their land to energy providers. However, there is less risk in leasing your land for wind turbines and solar panels than there is in farming it. These leases, depending on the size, can be quite lucrative and protect your farm from droughts and bad harvests. This constant income protects you while also still allowing you to use the land around the turbine. There really is no reason to fight the advance of renewable energy.

So, what is it going to take for Nebraska to reach a 100% renewable energy goal? We could simply wait for it to happen slowly over time, or we could use the power that our democracy gives us to make a serious change. Legislation is needed to create a renewable energy standard for Nebraska. I implore Nebraska lawmakers to create that renewable energy standard, holding energy providers accountable to reach 100% renewable energy. Help Nebraska become a leader in striving for a cleaner and more sustainable world.